



NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Communications Office

[Dara Demi](#), Communications Director, 919-856-7457

[Communications After Hours](#), 919-857-WAKE

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Date: March 14, 2017

Wake County Food Security Working Group Achieves Milestone

The Wake County Food Security Working Group is proud to announce that it has achieved a key milestone in its effort to provide more options to children who do not have regular and reliable access to nutritious food.

Every school in the Wake County Public School System with more than 50 percent of its student population qualifying for the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program now has at least one dedicated food resource – such as Universal School Breakfast, a food pantry or a backpack distribution program – that it can depend on to help feed hungry students.

“Research proves that students can’t focus on learning in the classroom if they’re hungry,” said Matt Calabria, Vice Chair of the Wake County Board of Commissioners and working group founder. “Nearly 45,000 children in our county may not always know where their next meal is coming from, which is why it’s so important to provide a source of healthy food that they can count on.”

The working group established a short-term goal in 2015 to enhance the dedicated food resources at every school in Wake County where at least half of the student population qualifies for Free and Reduced Price Lunch, which totaled 48 schools. Students are eligible for the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program, based on the number of people in their household and the household income level.

“Many of the schools needing additional resources are middle and high schools where backpack food distribution programs are not traditionally as effective,” said Monika Johnson-Hostler, Wake County School Board Chairwoman and working group member. “Mary E. Phillips High School is a great example of the effectiveness of establishing a food pantry at a school. From October 2016 when it opened through January 2017, it provided enough fresh, healthy food to serve 1,721 meals.”

Of the 48 schools identified in the 2014-2015 school year, 38 reported having a dedicated food resource. Over the past 18 months, the working group collaborated to add a dedicated food resource at the remaining 10 schools to meet its goal.

The working group is a partnership between Wake County, the Wake County Public School System, Wake County Human Services and its board, and Wake County Cooperative Extension. The Capital Area Food Network, Community Food Lab and Interfaith Food Shuttle have also contributed to the expansion of specific strategies to address this goal. Their overarching mission is to eliminate hunger in Wake County.

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